

## EDITORS' NOTE

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One of the things uncovered with the continued onslaught of COVID-19 pandemic is the inadequacy of our institutional achievements amidst tales of individual endurance and support for each other. The scale and severity of the virus's collision with our postmodern reality, threatening the collapse of existing social systems of our world, asks us to reassess the direction in which we, as a society, have been moving. The pandemic has revealed itself to be, what Jean-Luc Nancy calls, a "magnifying mirror" that provides our world an opportunity to re-cognize itself in its reflection. The present, patterned simultaneously around both the technological and the apocalyptic, however, has offered but slight modifications in existing interpretive paradigms. The fear of an imminent apocalyptic change, on the level of instinct at least, has wedged us between two conceptions of world: one on the verge of end, and the other too defeatist in its conception. This instinctual realization of an abyssal crisis of thought makes it difficult to imagine a secure future for human subject who shows an increasing disconnect between itself and its world.

Centrality of rational subject, within the Enlightenment thought—the ground of modernity—had imagined a world governed by the ideals of progress through 'human liberation,' consequent to man's control over nature, whereby human subject was conceived to be independent of all contingents. The idea of progress within this model, connecting it to the imaginary of utopia, was pegged upon the symbiotic relationship between man and machine to project possibilities of revolutionizing human world through the beneficial impact of technology. Even at the fag-end of twentieth century, these optimistic projections remained bound to the progressive structures of Enlightenment thought while attempting to restore a sense of a better future derived logically from the present communicative relationship between the individual and larger community (Habermas).

Against this long investment in rational thought, ensuring control over mass social energy, manifested another train of thought that Isaiah Berlin calls Counter-Enlightenment which culminated in the Romantic movements of both Europe and England. This model rejected the central operative tenet of Enlightenment progress through rationality, objectivity, and universality, and delivered different versions of utopia by including the supernatural, the fantastic, the oneiric, and/or the uncanny to represent a world of beauty and perfection. Even in the last century as well as in our present one, the influence of this alternate historical moment of Romanticism keeps on generating suspicions against Enlightenment's faith in teleological history of progress, along with its utopian models, to shape various dystopic premises. With the dreams of creating a global village—interdependent politico-economic-social structures—gone sour in the second decade of this century, our collective imagination latches onto dystopic

visions to underscore the “problematic features of society’s vision of the ideal” (Booker). Such dystopic turn in meaning and subjectivity counter positivist utopias as alternate spheres of thought, and challenge the ‘grand narratives of modernity’ by puncturing faith in any futuristic possibility. Satirising existent systems of acceleration and proliferation of means as well as ends, these narratives point to the problematics of systemic progress leaving the ethics of greater good in jeopardy.

In fact, the postmodern dystopic imagination questions ‘systems’ of any kind with the force of a scepticism that blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, construction and deconstruction, order and dis-order. Within the scope of this sceptic thought however accretion of disorderly systems, where contingency piles upon contingency, itself takes the shape of a system of sorts. Faith in the concept of any such system, though an anathema to the postmodern thought, is perhaps an attempt to recognize our readiness to rethink the monochromatic anthropocentric progress as simultaneous narratives of destruction and restoration. The waves of cultural and counter-cultural narratives within this system-of-sorts, therefore, testifies towards a need to evolve more refined mechanics of analysis by changing the lens that looks at the need for utopia or dystopia and its ramifications like apocalyptic catastrophe.

The present scenario of COVID-19, as near to dystopic catastrophe as we could have imagined, unmasks the politico-economical hollowness of the age while unveiling the fault lines of the very conceptualisation and foundation of progress and welfare of society. With ever more forms of surveillance, the otherwise dysfunctional states wield ever more power at the expense of the individual, resulting in disenfranchisement of grounds that sustain the possibility of ethical governance. Girded by the entwining of the ethical with the economic, our existential reality in the face of COVID-19 grapples with the problematic of action in the network of life-world. The fundamental question that we ultimately face as individuals, organizations, and nations is then as much existential as it is ethical. The ensuing “*chaosmos*,” (to use James Joyce’s term) which has become pervasive in our society and consciousness offers us a chance to reject our monochromatic interpretations and evolve new modes of analysis through self-reflection; ponder upon the foundations of our social relations as well as our individual selves rather than keep on accruing disorderly systems of thought in the name of progress.

The question that confronts us however is whether such modes of analysis are even available to us. Any attempt to delineate alternate visions of both present and future, either as Enlightenment’s utopias or Modern apocalyptic dystopias, is laudable for showcasing the changing consciousness and patterns of perception about existing systems within our world. Such imaginings though generally entail accelerating technological revolutions, intensification of systems at every stage, rational response based upon co-ordinated social life, as well as capitalist structures of production, consumption, and distribution. That is why, the new mechanics within our contemporary worldview may still bear the pockmarks of interpretations which are equivalent of a necessarily humanist understanding of the world.

Even the dystopian impulse in the modern and postmodern literature hinges itself upon a structural brace whose influence gets amplified only by a subterranean organizing ethos that may, while leading to a depiction of a world which may appear to be at loggerheads with the existing one, actually finds itself to be in sync with it. In an attempt to understand the nature of advancement despite the apocalyptic dystopia, the papers in the Issue discuss its flip side which underpins the anxieties surrounding it. Employing the Greek myth of the Labyrinth of Crete, Loraine Heywood deals with the layered representation of dystopia in the film, *Joker*. The entropic scenario depicted in the film conjoins the individual and the city as suffering beneath the dominant neoliberal Western capitalist forces. In the next paper of the Issue, taking Shakespeare's vision of humanity in *King Lear* to be the cornerstone of our understanding of modernity, James Baumlin shows that Shakespeare couldn't anticipate the wave of boundless technocultural developments towards posthumanism, as witnessed in the epochal analysis developed vis-à-vis Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*. Discussing the catastrophic aspects of reality in tandem with the need to comprehend and name the post-Shakespearean turn of events, the paper argues for the narrative of hope amidst the shifts in lifeworld. In the Special Submissions category, Danielle Agyemang brings to light unresolved problematics of the practice of Trokosi in West Africa with a focus on Ghana. Deploying the methodology of interview with the natives, the paper navigates through the conflicting issues of cultural relativism and universalism, with a view to problematize the assumptions operative in the rescue-educate-integrate approach adopted by the reformists.

This Issue marks the beginning of our fourth volume and we celebrate the occasion with a whole new journal design, for which we owe a lot to our Editorial Assistant, Ritupma Shekhawat. The team of *LLIDS* would like to express gratitude to the scholars associated with the journal as authors and peer reviewers who, despite these trying circumstances, have worked with us to bring together this Issue. We extend support and solidarity to all our readers for their constant support and encouragement in these fraught times.

## Works Cited

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